1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

462 ing field; though by far the greater part of their time is spent in listless lounging or heedless slumber under the incidental guard of roaming youths and toiling women. The matrons are the real workers in the tribal hive; they are normally alert and active, passing from one simple task to another, gathering flotsam food along the beach or preparing edibles in the shadow of the jacal, with an eye ever on material possessions and children; they frequently join in hunting excursions of considerable extent; they are the chief manufacturers of apparel, utensils, and tools; and the scions of Castilian caballeros are not infrequently staggered at the sight of half a dozen Seri women "milling" a band of horses, and at intervals leaping on one to kill it with their hupfa. The masculine drones are the more petted and courted by reason of their fewness, for during a century or two, at least, the women have far outnumbered their consorts—a disproportion doubtless tending in some respects toward the disintegration of the clan system and, reciprocally, toward the firmer union of the tribe.

[162] [562]

One of the most noteworthy extensions of feminine functions among the Seri is toward shamanism. So far as could be ascertained from Mashém and the associated matrons at Costa Rica, it is such beldams as Juana María who concoct the arrow "poison", compound both necromantic medicines and curative simples, cast spells on men and things, and even fabricate the stone arrowpoints and counterfeit cartridges; though unhappily the data are neither so full nor so decisive as desirable.[1]

[756]

562 623 Conformably with their prominence in proprietary affairs, the Seri matrons seem to exercise formal legislative and judicative functions; for not only do they hold their own councils for the arrangement of the domestic business of the rancherías, but they also participate prominently in the tribal councils (as explained by Mashém), and play important rôles in carrying out the decisions of such councils—as when they cooperate with war parties as decoys, or journey across their bounding desert to spy out the land of the enemy.

614 On the whole, it would appear that the clan organization of the Seri conforms closely with that characteristic of savagery elsewhere, especially among the American aborigines. The social unit is the maternal clan, organized in theory and faith in homage of a beast-god, though defined practically by the ocular consanguinity of birth from a common line of mothers; yet the several units are pretty definitely welded into a tribal aggregate by common feelings, identical interests, and conjugal ties. The most distinctive features brought out by the incomplete investigation are the somewhat exceptional manifestation of property-right in the females, the singularly strong sense of maternal relation, and the apparent prominence of females in shamanistic practices as well as in the tribal councils.

[619]

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[1] The agency of the women in applying the arrow "poison" was noted by Hardy; cf. p. 224.

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

CHIEFSHIP

554 614 619

The unformulated tribal laws of the Seri are intimately connected with leadership, which is, in turn, largely a reflection of personal characteristics; so that the tribal organization is about as variable as that of the practically autonomous herds of cattle ranging the Sonoran plains adjacent to Seriland. Indeed, just as the stock-clans enjoy a precedence on pasturage and at waterholes, determined by the valor and strength of the bulls by which they are led, so the Seri clans appear to be graded by the prowess of their masculine leaders, combined with the sortilegic success of the leaders' consorts; while, just as the leadership of the cattle shifts from band to band as the years go by, according to the fairly equal hazard of natural selection, so the clan dynasties of the human group rise, flourish, and decline in an endless succession shaped by the chances of birth and survival under a capricious environment, by the fate of battles internecine and external, and by various other factors. The instability of the Seri organization is demonstrated by the tribal changes recorded in history, as well as by the vicissitudes within the memory of Señor Encinas and others. At the beginning of the records the Upangnayma were already exiled from Seriland proper [175] and apparently suffering from raids of their collinguals; within a century the Guayma, also, were expatriated and nearly annihilated; then, in the early part of the present century, the Tepoka were extruded and (after a series of wars in active progress in Hardy's time) forced far up the coast to one of the poorest habitats ever occupied by any folk. So, too, throughout the Encinas régime the internal dissensions continued whenever the clans were not combined against aliens; and the veteran pioneer has seen much intratribal strife, attended by the rise and passing of many chiefs, both acknowledged and pretended, and often exercising chiefly prerogatives two or three at a time. This instability grows largely out of the fact that the essential unit is the clan, and that the tribe is nothing more than a lax aggregation; and it is measurably explained by the crude customs accompanying the choice of leaders.

562 614

As already noted, the clan organization is maternal, and the clan-mother is the central figure of the group; but the executive power resides in her brothers in the order of seniority—i. e., while the personal arrangement of the group is maternal, the appellate administration is fraternal. So far as could be ascertained, the form of government is clearly discriminable from that commonly styled avuncular; for, in the first place, the minor administration accompanying the control of property invests the elderwomen with exceptional legislative and judicative powers, while, in the second place, there are no old men (by reason of the militant habit), so that the reverence for age so assiduously cultivated in primitive life extends to matrons much more than to men. [889]

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930) 1931 NU31 Seri NU31

NEW DATA

Informants' Attitude

Most of my information was obtained from Chico Romero, the present official chief, a man of about 38. Santo Blanco and one or two other men contributed occasionally. Sr. Thomson was present most of the time and aided materially, both in encouraging the Seri and in helping to formulate questions suitably to their experience and comprehension. For instance, he repeatedly cleared up points in the kinship system by applying his knowledge of the actual relationship of Seri individuals, or their acquaintance with his relatives, to frame concrete cases, real or hypothetical, for which a denomination was then readily given. Without this aid, the system could not have been obtained with either reasonable surety or correctness. So far as possible, direct questions were replaced by giving to the Seri accounts of customs attributed to the Cocopa, of whose existence they know, and suggesting comparisons, in which they proved interested. On the whole, their attitude was friendly, coöperative, and appeared unsecretive. Concealment may be so automatic a habit with them that they practice it without giving a sign; but I had the constant impression that they told little about their religion because they knew little, and not from any skilfully concealed reluctance. Still, all negative statements must be regarded as only tentative when secured in a brief time through an imperfect medium of communication from informants not accustomed to mental exertion.

Historical Tradition

There were formerly four tribes, according to the informant: to the East, the Seris, at Pueblo de los Seris (the ex-mission, across the river from Hermosillo); to the West, the Tiburónes, on the island; to the North, at Tepoca, the Xeka'aikö'ye; to the South, at Tastiota, the Antepké'itaX or Tastioteños. Too many died at Pueblo Seris, so they joined the Tiburones. They fought the northern and southern groups. Sixty (or 68) Seri-Tiburones once went to Tepoca to kill a man and his two sons. They made marks and stuck a knife in the trail to cause them to stop. Then they shot them. The women and children were captured, taken to the island and kept, the women first being abused by the whole party. The informant's son José Manuel (13) had a Tepoca maternal grandmother; that is, the informant, now about 38, married the daughter of a Tepoca woman. (This would put the incident hardly earlier than 1860 or later than 1890.) Similarly, there is Tastioteño blood among the present Seri. The dialects of the several tribes are said to have been distinct, though allied.

It is evident that these memories cover only the last part of the period of Spanish contacts.

[89 cont.]

000 abundant flying and, especially, marine fauna.

For a modern technology, their region has great resources,
511 but for the culture of the Seri it is frankly inhospitable. The standard of living is exceedingly low, as is proclaimed by natives and foreigners and as is demonstrated by the illnesses and hunger that weaken the population.

[90] The Seri truly form part of our Western society, in
226 so far as they catch fish, with fishhooks and motorboats, to sell
439 in the markets of Hermosillo, Nogales, and Tucson, and they
[177] obtain payments in national specie and coin. The part that
182 they form, however, has its own internal structure, which regulates the relations with the environment and among its mem-
[161] bers, even though a group of 218 persons, which suffers severe alterations in percentages from disasters like the sinking of a boat or strokes of good luck like the establishment of a prosperous fishing camp, is almost insignificant for the nation.

Most probably they have never been much more numerous, and they must not have had great cohesion in the past, a situation explicable in view of their nomadic gathering economy.
621 Toward the close of the 18th century they were divided into bands, of which it is known that the most important were the Guaymas, Upanguaymas, Tepocas, Tiburones, and Salineros.
[648] They banded together at various times in order to defend themselves and to attack the nuclei of Mexicans of the zone, achieving combined action, but without effective political unity.

● 619 At present they seem to form a single group without marked subdivisions, although they recognize affiliations like that of "Tiburones," "half-Papago," etc., which appear to have little real classificatory significance.

184 There is great uniformity: they speak a single language
619 incomprehensible to the rest of humanity; they have a relatively uniform culture, and there is tribal unification for matters involving sexual exchange.

361 The most obvious relations are spatial; they have important settlements that sprung up around the fishing establishments and are more or less permanently occupied. Of these, "El Desemboque," close to the mouth of a river from which they have been displaced, is the most important, with 80 per cent of the Seri

[90 cont.]

361 population. There is an obvious separation there between the
563 Seri and the yori, or non-Seri, with manifest differences in cultural patterns.

The yori occupy an extensive area per person; their homes are quite distant from one another, and four families in conjunction occupy a belt of land of about 100 by 50 meters.

361 The Seri are grouped by families, inhabiting minute squares of from one and a half to two meters to a side. The yori
182 feeling of prestige, based on the territorial expanse of their prop-
361 erty, contrasts with the feeling of security based on personal
511 contact that dominates many aspects of Seri life; the small size of the Seri habitation indicates, not a low standard of living, but a distinct [91] concept of comfort, according to which the Seri, having all the desert to live in, like the yori, confine themselves to the limits that personal contact permits.

In January, 1952, there were 35 dwellings, with an aver-
592 age of 4.6 persons in each, those lodging four, five, and six persons frankly predominating. Each three or four more closely related families occupied contiguous homes, forming relatively separate conjunctions by themselves, which we might call
596 macrofamilies.

The family is the basic Seri institution, which is manifest in all aspects of life: it is the center of production, co-operation, the division of labor, education, diversion, government, etc.

582 Going beyond the family and macrofamily organization,
● 619 we have a tribal structure based on the generalized exchange (2)
621

2. Lévy Strauss, Les Structures élémentaires de la Parenté [Elementary Kinship Structures], Paris, 1949.

of members for concluding marriage, by which all the Seri are actually linked by consanguinity or affinity. One is almost able to include all the members of the tribe on a single genealogical chart, systematically excluding only some few outsiders who have penetrated the group.

582 This situation, which would make one think of a primitive

● 619

/For information on the organization of the Seri into bands, see category 642./

642 621 618 114 [186] [476]

The third specification states that a kin group, to constitute a clan, must exhibit actual social integration. Murdock stresses the necessity of observing a positive group sentiment, such as would be manifested by organized collective activities or group functions, before the group can be characterized as a clan. An essential feature of this group sentiment is the inclusion of the wife as an integral member of her husband's kin group.

621 618 [628] [622] [701] [583] [476]

This sort of social integration was indeed exhibited by the Seri kin group of each subdivision. It was, in fact, fostered by the isolation brought about by the inhabitants' reservation of hunting and fishing rights for themselves. Tension existed between certain subdivisions and, since there was no chief, the oldest capable male organized and led the fighting force of the clan. In times of need, the members of the group united to give mutual assistance. The groom-to-be could expect material aid from his fellow clan members in the payment of the bride price. Mutual assistance was given in the fulfillment of puberty ceremony and burial obligations. The men cooperated in their hunting and fishing expeditions. The women of the clan, including the in-married spouses, cooperated in the gathering and sharing of food. Everyone could attend the various fiestas. It is said that in the performance of these collective activities, close harmony generally prevailed.

BAND INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

642 619 578 [648]

The division of the Seri tribe into bands was likely brought about through internal strife. During the period of band history known to the present-day Seri,[8] however, serious skirmishes seem to have been fought predominantly with non-Seri groups.[9]

Band I

642 621 628 578 [721] [648]

Band I internal relations appear to have been relatively peaceful. The inhabitants of subdivisions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 were fishermen as well as hunters and gatherers, whereas the people of subdivision 6 preferred to subsist on gathered food and wild game. Also, the members of Band I robbed cattle and horses, which pursuit brought reprisals from the Mexican ranchers. There was apparently considerable social intercourse among the six subdivisions, even to the extent that hunting rights of one were sometimes granted to inhabitants of a neighboring section.

Trouble developed when some members of Band I speared fish within the domain of Band V. Here also bitter fighting broke out, and any semblance of peaceful co-existence between the two groups was destroyed.